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SUBJECT: DRC BORDER SECURITY REMAINS ILLUSIVE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: N'Djili International Airport in Kinshasa and Ngobila Beach, the ferry crossing point to Brazzaville, abound with examples of poor adherence by the GDRC to international border security norms. The GDRC's attempts to correct this situation have not yet yielded results. Parallel efforts by the GDRC to control illegal aliens operating in the mining sector in Katanga province may have a spillover effect nationwide, and Post is watching this situation for possible repercussions for American citizens. End Summary.

Secure Borders?

¶2. (SBU) During a late January visit to both the N'djili International Airport in Kinshasa and to Ngobila Beach, the official Congo River border station with daily ferry traffic to Brazzaville in the ROC, ConOff and consular staff made several observations concerning the current state of border security and passenger controls that raise serious questions about the DRC government's adherence to international border security norms. Regarding Ngobila Beach, DRC immigration and customs officials estimate that 5,000 persons or more are legally crossing the border on a daily basis, mostly small-scale commercial traders who are transporting goods to and from the DRC from the Republic of Congo. These wares largely consist of locally traded items, including bolts of locally-manufactured fabric and plastics, flour, rice, sugar, rubber shoes, plastic bags and some produce.

¶3. (SBU) While the GDRC ferry boat has a capacity of 500 persons, clearly 700 or more people had embarked upon the ferry boat that was present at the time of the visit. While most had paid the 500 franc Congolaise (approximately \$.90) fare, many had not and these extra passengers boarded the ferry after a short swim in the river or by propelling themselves hand over hand along the underneath side of the gangplank linking the boat with the dock. Additionally, another quarter of the passengers were the locally infamous wheelchair-bound handicapped who are boarded free of charge and are afforded special customs exemptions limited to what they and their helper can transport on their wheelchairs. During the visit, no passenger screening measures were observed and in fact, the fluidity of passenger and cargo travel was astonishing.

¶4. (SBU) Kinshasa's N'djili International Airport has international flights to Belgium, France, South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia that connect to flights to the United States. During the consular staff outreach visit to inspect airport facilities and meet with airport authorities, immigration and airport security officials offered a demonstration of their X-ray screening procedures for hand baggage for departing passengers. ConOff offered her own hand bag for this inspection under the watchful eye of several specially trained airport security officials. The hand bag was scanned three times during various stages of the check-in process, and her pocketknife was never discovered, although clearly in plain view on the X-ray.

(Note: X-ray scanners, computers and other security screening equipment function with varying degrees of accuracy at N'djili International Airport. These systems vary, depending on how well trained and regularly paid the airport screeners are, as well as on the simple availability of electricity. End note.)

Worried about Public Image

¶5. (SBU) N'djili International Airport and Ngobila Beach have long been known for their Byzantine arrival and departure procedures involving up to 18 different agencies and services that check arriving and departing passengers for both domestic and international travel.

¶6. (SBU) In an effort to combat the DRC's "negative image" with international travelers, it was announced recently that Interior Minister Kalume has ordered the reduction in security and customs services now functioning at all airports and border stations country-wide in an effort to both streamline operations and improve border security

¶7. (SBU) In principal, the Congolese National Police Chief Inspector is now the coordinator of security services from the five designated agencies which include: Director General of Immigration (DGM), Customs and Taxation (OFIDA), Congolese Office of Control (OCC), the Airport Operations Authority (RVA) for N'djili and the National Office of Transportation (ONATRA) for Ngobila Beach. Within these agencies "special services" operate, namely the National Intelligence Agency (ANR), the Military Agency for the Detection of Anti-Patriotic Activities (DEMIAP), the (nebulous) Agency for the Defense of Kinshasa (DIVK) whose function is not clearly known, and the Agency for Airport Security (ASA). The overall security of the

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airport remains under the authority of the Republican Guard, a component of the Congolese Army reporting to the Presidency.

¶8. (SBU) Consular and other mission personnel often hear anecdotal accounts of the harassment of American and other travelers at the DRC's major ports of entry, and many have observed money changing hands to permit the passage of baggage and passengers who have not been screened by airport authorities.

DGM Crackdown in Katanga

¶9. (SBU) Lubumbashi, the capital of Katanga province, is the headquarters of many mining firms. In a recent Consular visit to the province, government officials commented there is a growing problem with illegal aliens, notably Chinese, Indian and Lebanese nationals, nearly all of whom are involved in some way with the mining sector. Among the most vociferous on this point were DGM officials, so it did not come as a surprise when reports began arriving of DGM's recent efforts to crack down on illegal aliens in Katanga province.

¶10. (SBU) As noted in the warden message issued by Post on April 16, DGM officials have begun a targeted campaign to ensure that all foreigners are in compliance with existing immigration law and have the proper visa based upon their stated purpose of visiting or residing in the DRC. This campaign began in Katanga province, but Post understands that it may be extended to all DRC provinces and would require all non-Congolese to present evidence of legal residence in the country. While this effort would seem to have merit with respect to border security and is in accordance with local law and immigration regulation, Post has received reports of uneven enforcement, of "auxiliary" fines being imposed on foreigners not carrying their passports. In recent discussions with the DGM Director, Post was assured that reported abuses by DGM personnel would be dealt with swiftly but the DGM also told us it is serious about this enforcement effort, primarily to combat what is perceived as growing illegal mining activity in the Katanga province. Note: Post has issued a new warden message to Americans living in or visiting the DRC alerting them to the possible increased enforcement

of local immigration laws, aimed specifically at foreigners resident or temporarily present in the DRC. End note.

¶11. (SBU) Comment. Post supports efforts to apply DRC immigration laws, and streamline operations at airports and border crossings in the DRC. Although there have been no reports to date, the Deputy Director of the DGM has personally assured Post that all reported harassment of American citizens by DGM officials will be swiftly investigated and resolved. Despite this apparent renewed GDRC attention to immigration and border issues, however, security remains far below international standards. The fact remains that real border security is still an illusion in the DRC. End comment.

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